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SUBJECT: GROING FOR NATIONAL UNITY

Classified By: CDA Gerald Feierstein, for reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Pitching the need for national unity to tackle the extremist challenge has become the flavor of the day, but Pakistan's politicians still are focused first and foremost on their own survival. PM Gilani increasingly is aligning himself with Nawaz Sharif through negotiations to restore the Pakistan Muslim League-N/Pakistan People's Party coalition in Punjab, promises to form an all-parties committee, and efforts to repeal the 17th amendment. This is alienating Gilani from President Zardari, who has made half-hearted and reportedly clumsy gestures at outreach to Nawaz. Mutual Zardari-Nawaz suspicion is blocking serious discussion of efforts to form a national unity government. Out in the cold in Punjab, the Pakistan Muslim League reportedly is negotiating to join the national coalition but opposing plans to help Nawaz by repealing the 17th amendment.

¶2. (C) Gilani asked Charge for assistance in strengthening law enforcement's ability to hold areas once the Army/Frontier Corps leaves, as they must; it was also critical to help the growing IDP population. Charge outlined ongoing USG plans to respond to GOP military and police support requests and help with IDPs (septel). Gilani tried to sell a bit of revisionist history by claiming that the decision to sign the Nizam-e-Adl Regulation was all part of a grand plan to let Sufi Mohammed and the taliban overreach, as the Pakistani government and military knew he would. Now the nation was united behind the fight, according to Gilani.

¶3. (C) But Zardari and Gilani failed even to introduce their planned National Assembly resolution in support of military action in the Northwest Frontier Province before Zardari left Pakistan for a two week tour to include bilateral/trilateral meetings in Washington. The Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) privately supports military action against the militants but will not say so publicly, according to Opposition Leader Chaudhry Nisar; gaining PML-N support would require Zardari to take the opposition into greater confidence. But PML-N continues to reach out to the U.S.; Nisar wants to visit Washington in June/July to lay the groundwork for a later Nawaz visit. End Summary.

¶4. (C) Charge and A/DCM met April 29 with PM Gilani for an hour and a half; A/DCM met separately with Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) Opposition leader Chaudhry Nisar. A/DCM met April 23 with Pakistan Muslim League President Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain.

All Parties Committee

15. (C) There is a growing chorus of statements on the need to create political unity in the face of a serious insurgent challenge. President Zardari April 29 (the day before leaving Pakistan for two weeks) publicly called on citizens to put political differences aside and back the troops fighting the taliban in the Northwest Frontier Province. An unusually assertive Gilani told Charge that "I'm a statesman, not a politician," and the time had come to put petty political disagreements aside and unite to win the war against militants. Nawaz Sharif wrote to PM Gilani urging him to form an all-parties committee to address security and other national challenges.

16. (C) PML President Chaudhry Shujaat told A/DCM that, for the first time in 30 years, he was truly worried; the upper classes, he said, now were concerned about pro-taliban sentiments in their servants and their guards. Now was the time to put aside political infighting and focus on the dire threat to the nation. The religious parties, Jamaat Islami and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam are both under attack by Sufi Mohammed, who declared Islam and democracy were incompatible; Shujaat believed these parties would have no choice but to embrace an all-parties committee. Muttahida Quami Movement leader Sattar previously told Charge that his party would support formation of a unity government.

17. (C) Gilani felt this unification effort should begin in Punjab. "I convinced President Zardari to take a U-turn and agree that the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) would rejoin PML-N in the Punjab. When the Supreme Court reinstated the

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status quo in Punjab, they reinstated the PML-N/PPP coalition government. I negotiated the timing of this so that Shahbaz Sharif could resume his post as Chief Minister without additional challenges. I also have ordered that the National Assembly seat that Nawaz Sharif planned to contest (before his disqualification) be left open so that if he wins his court challenge he can become a parliamentarian." He noted that he had discussed this idea with Shahbaz Sharif in recent meetings in Lahore. Asked if that meant PML-N would rejoin the national coalition, Gilani said this was a different issue. Having the PPP resume its role in Punjab was a positive decision, but having PML-N reverse its decision to quit the cabinet was more complicated.

18. (C) Gilani has asked National Assembly Speaker Mirza, currently on a visit to China, to form an all-parties committee when she returned to consider repeal of the 17th amendment, following up on a request from PML-N. However, Gilani said he was going further; he had promised Nawaz he would work on implementing the PPP/PML-N Charter of Democracy, which included a commitment to repeal the 17th amendment. He has begun quiet meetings with opposition leaders, including PML-N's Chaudhry Nisar, and then will move on to discussions with coalition partners. Gilani admitted there was concern within the PPP (read Zardari) that repealing the 17th amendment would benefit Nawaz, who then would be empowered to destabilize the government. Gilani replied that Benazir had committed to repealing the 17th amendment and, given the challenges Pakistan faces, this is no time to think about "one's own seat." On April 29, the Senate adopted a resolution calling on Senate leader Naek to form a committee to implement the Charter of Democracy; PML, which is not a signatory to the Charter, opposed this move.

19. (C) Chaudhry Nisar confirmed to A/DCM that PML-N would welcome the PPP back into the Punjab but indicated this was a gesture to Gilani; 56 members of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) had defected to the PML-N in Punjab, so the party did not need PPP's votes to rule. Nisar confided that PML President Chaudhry Shujaat had been in secret negotiations with Zardari to join the coalition in the center. This follows Shujaat's apparently failed efforts to press for a national unity government as a way to get his party back into

power at the national level.

Clumsy Outreach

¶10. (C) Nisar explained in some detail what he described as Zardari's clumsy attempt to reach out to Nawaz, who agreed at once to the concept of a joint meeting and even postponed a trip to Europe to be available. Nisar said that Nawaz had appreciated Ambassador Holbrooke's call on this issue. Zardari sent a friend (nfi) to Nawaz's Lahore home to negotiate the details; negotiations lasted for more than eight hours of phone calls every five minutes in which the presidency offered different ideas (Zardari could not come to Raiwind, could he send a helicopter for Nawaz? Could Nawaz call Zardari's chief of staff to extend an invitation?) that were never acceptable to both sides. This was indicative of the problems dealing with Zardari, said Nisar, so the idea of PML-N rejoining a national coalition with the PPP simply was not tenable.

Strengthening COIN Capacity

¶11. (C) Gilani repeated his mantra that Pakistan had the will and the capability to fight extremism but lacked the capacity. He ticked off a list of items on which he needed assistance, beginning with a strengthening of law enforcement and including assistance on internally displaced persons (septel) and development. Gilani said that IMF restrictions were forcing him to shift resources from development to the police, which meant that of the government's "3 D" strategy (dialogue, deterrence and development), he was now only implementing the deterrence pillar.

¶12. (C) Insisting that there be an exit strategy for the Army after it clears out militants, Gilani said that he needed to strengthen law enforcement so that when the Army left, the vacuum would not be filled by the extremists. This is what happened after we won the jihad against the Soviets,

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he said; neither Pakistan nor the U.S. could afford to make this mistake again. He cited the need to help the police with: bomb-proof police stations, armored troop carriers, protective vests, explosive detection devices, training, life insurance and widow/orphan benefits. He also mentioned his concern about the 3.5 million Afghan refugees still present in Pakistan and the need to increase cross-border controls to reduce opportunities for these refugees to cause trouble.

¶13. (C) Charge reviewed in general terms how the U.S. military was responding to Pakistani military requests for helicopters, ammunition and intelligence in support of current operations. He provided a more detailed explanation of our current efforts and plans to assist law enforcement across Pakistan, beginning with the NWFP's Elite Police unit. This included training, vests, hardened police stations, and armored vehicles. There were legal hurdles to funding salaries or death benefits, but we could perhaps help the NWFP government in other ways that could compensate for their need to shift funding from development to the police. However, Charge noted our frustration at having the money to assist but lacking GOP approval for access to areas like Swat. He hoped that once military operations were completed in Dir and Buner, we could begin strengthening the police there.

Swat/Nizam-e-Adl

¶14. (C) Without ever mentioning TNSM leader Sufi Mohammed by name, Gilani gave the GOP's defense of the Swat agreement and claimed that when it became clear the taliban had not implemented the agreement as promised, "I ordered Army action." The civilian government and the Army, he suggested,

signed the deal knowing that Sufi would not be able to deliver and the Taliban would renege. In this culture where signing an agreement binds all parties, the fact the taliban were not complying while government has implemented Nizam-e-Adl gave the government the moral advantage required to resume military operations. Gilani admitted that "I took refuge in the parliament" to strengthen proof of the government's commitment to peace.

¶15. (C) Gilani noted that neither the GOP nor the U.S. can afford instability in the NWFP; if Zardari had refused to sign Nizam-e-Adl, the Awami National Party (ANP) would have been forced to quit the coalition and the NWFP provincial government, leaving a vacuum for Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam leader Fazlur Rehman to fill. Returning to the failed religious party control of the NWFP was not in our interests, asserted Gilani. Now, said Gilani, the release of the video showing a woman being flogged (whenever it was filmed) and Sufi's intemperate statements have galvanized popular opinion against the taliban.

¶16. (C) Nisar said flatly that PML-N supported military action against extremists but would not say so publicly. This was because the PPP had failed to take PML-N or even its own coalition partners into confidence about what was going on. Asked if Zardari's April 28 meeting with the joint parliamentary committee on security was evidence of this kind of outreach, Nisar said no--Zardari offered no new information at the meeting, which he called only so he could assure Washington he had consulted broadly across political parties.

¶17. (C) Continuing PML-N's new outreach to Washington, Nisar said he would like to visit Washington in late June/early July and would appreciate help in arranging meetings. The visit was to lay the groundwork for a Washington visit by Nawaz, hopefully some time this year. Nisar also urged the creation of more institutional links between the U.S. Congress and Pakistan's parliament.

¶18. (C) Comment: We should continue to encourage Zardari and Gilani to consult widely across the political spectrum before the current popular momentum in favor of military action against extremists fades. We should tell Nawaz it is no longer in his interest to be politically coy--he needs to come out publicly in support of military action.

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